

February 18, 2020

Kellyann Day, Chief Executive Officer, New Reach, Inc.

RE: State of Connecticut (CT) Raised Bill No. 105 – An Act Establishing a Right to Housing

My name is Kellyann Day, and I have been the Chief Executive Officer for New Reach for nearly 25 years. New Reach is a nonprofit that serves over 3,300 people annually in New Haven and Fairfield counties who are affected by homelessness and poverty through an integrated service model that includes prevention, crisis services and housing. With about 75 highly qualified staff, our goal is to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time. Today, I am here to strongly advocate for Bill 105 as New Reach has seen firsthand how a proven prevention model can effectively and efficiently prevent evictions as well as homelessness and save significant societal costs.

The Princeton Eviction Lab shows that Connecticut had 13,760 evictions in 2016 and 17,470 eviction filings. The cumulative number of evictions in Bridgeport, New Haven, Waterbury, and Hartford make up about 50 percent of this total.

I would like to address two components of the Rights to Housing Act.

First, we fully advocate the provision of assistance and services that include, but are not limited to, the payment of rent and utility arrearages together with legal support for residents facing eviction, as well as connections to services that would address such factors that could lead to homelessness.

I can fully speak to this because one prime example of a successful eviction prevention approach is New Reach's Stable Families Program. Our Stable Families Program began in 2009 and helps families living in Bridgeport's low-income housing through proven home visiting case management practices to address their acute needs. Over its 10-year history, this program has annually prevented eviction, on average, 99 percent of the time (we have served an average 79 families per year). A recent case study has provided further compelling evidence of the program's success. Of the families that discharged from the program over the past four years, not one has since entered the homelessness system.

A key component, however, of this proven prevention effort is our strong partnership with CT Legal Services to ensure that timely legal help is attained in tandem with the social services that uncover and address the underlying causes of housing instability. Our continual waitlists reflect the need for eviction prevention for at least twice the number currently being served in Bridgeport, and even greater numbers in New Haven and Fairfield counties as well as across the state.

The second component, that those who become homeless have the right to clean and safe environment to stay until they find permanent housing is of course critical. We cannot obliterate emergency shelters. However, the cost to operate safe, supportive, and well-run shelters far exceeds the cost of preventing eviction. In other words, yes, residents do have a right to emergency shelters based upon a working coordinated access network, but strategies that work with individuals, youth and families who are at risk of eviction and include a single point of access to legal services and social supports that address the underlying causes of housing instability (including, when appropriate, access to a rental bank) will more effectively remedy the problem with far less costs.

There are multiple causes of homelessness typically resulting from a combination of life situations, but those with low incomes and high housing costs are at the greatest risk.

A study led by Marybeth Shinn on efficiently targeting homelessness prevention services for families found “no evidence that some families were too risky to be helped or that specific risk factors were particularly amenable to amelioration.”<sup>1</sup> The study further illuminated how decisions on funding efficient and effective prevention models depends on the costs of homelessness – to families as well as cities and states. In other words, I speak from the perspective of a proven successful model that works collaboratively and through operations that use evidence-based practices. New Reach is a prime example of how preventing homelessness is a cost-saving approach to ending homelessness. We advocate the approach of prevention, rather than a specific model – getting services to people who will benefit from them, stabilize, and help them live more fulfilling lives.

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<sup>1</sup> M.Shinn et.al., AM J Public Health. 2013 December; 103(Suppl 2): S324-S330